



Early Journal Content on JSTOR, Free to Anyone in the World

This article is one of nearly 500,000 scholarly works digitized and made freely available to everyone in the world by JSTOR.

Known as the Early Journal Content, this set of works include research articles, news, letters, and other writings published in more than 200 of the oldest leading academic journals. The works date from the mid-seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries.

We encourage people to read and share the Early Journal Content openly and to tell others that this resource exists. People may post this content online or redistribute in any way for non-commercial purposes.

Read more about Early Journal Content at <http://about.jstor.org/participate-jstor/individuals/early-journal-content>.

JSTOR is a digital library of academic journals, books, and primary source objects. JSTOR helps people discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content through a powerful research and teaching platform, and preserves this content for future generations. JSTOR is part of ITHAKA, a not-for-profit organization that also includes Ithaka S+R and Portico. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

EXPERIENCES OF A TRUE BACONIAN IN SHAKESPEARE'S TOWN

BY W. D. HOWELLS

As a firm, and even violent, supporter of the Baconian theory of the Shakespeare authorship I approached Stratford-on-Avon with buoyant expectations of pleasure from my doctrine there mixed with fond regrets for the excellent hotel we had left in Leamington. I had dismissed the lingering fear of being obliged to change cars which had beset me to the very suburbs of the town, and I could freely abandon myself to the emotions proper to the place. I thought of the young Francis Bacon emerging from a clump of trees which we passed, and crossing a meadow with our train, rapt from memories of his overnight's deer-stalking at the expense of Sir Thomas Lucy, in a reverie of Hamlet, of Romeo, of Othello, of Julius Cæsar, of Prince Hal and Falstaff, of Ophelia and Rosalind, of Desdemona and Beatrice, as well as of The Passionate Pilgrim and the Sonnets, and exulting in the notion of fooling future ages in his masquerade of William Shakespeare, the clownish villager of Stratford and dull supernumerary of the Globe Theater. My Bacon's mind was busy not only with the creatures of his divine imagination, but with the ingenious contrivance of a cryptic acrostic in which his name should remain concealed throughout those immortal plays until, ages afterward, a crazy countrywoman of my own should detect in them the same light touch we know in the Essays and the *Novum Organum*, and her followers should, in a fine frenzy, drag his identity from its hundred hiding-places. I fancied the Sweet Frank holding horses before the theater in Southwark, or rollicking at the Mermaid Tavern with Ben Jonson, and bantering his fellow-poet to point out a single one of those thousand lines which the magnanimous pedant said the

plays would be the better for his blotting. I saw him come joyously masking down the years to the time of Milton, amusing himself by inspiring the patronizing apostrophe to

"Sweetest Bacon, Fancy's child,
Warbling his native wood-notes wild."

Then, later, as I stood beside that world-renowned tablet in the floor of the Stratford church, thought of the noble amend which the great Puritan poet had made in the lines beginning,

"What needs my Bacon for his honored bones?"

But this was after I had been some days in Stratford, where I remained through all our difficulties in housing ourselves, strong in the Bacon religion which necessarily involved the denial of the Shakespeare superstition.

It was our luck always to be coming to places at the height of their seasons unawares, when every hotel was full-up. But in this case we knew beforehand that there was to be a revival of the old English dances in the Bacon theater, which would probably crowd Stratford to bursting with strangers, and we secured our lodgings a fortnight in advance. We easily found them, and the smiling maid who met us said, "They were to be in the cottage, *weren't they?*" in that charming English way which obliges you to fall in with any presumption, and makes you *particeps criminis* against yourself. The "cottage" stood back of a little court, and the rooms, when seen, proved to be two small coops in the roof adapted to the tastes of poultry that did not care much for fresh air. We said they would not do, and returned to our fly, and went about flinging ourselves on the mercies of a town visitored far beyond its capacity. Our driver remembered at last an ideal place, "More like a villa, sir, than a lodging," but this ideal was shut when we reached it, and we drove down the next street, interrogating the transoms of all the houses with beseeching eyes for the word "Apartments," but in vain, till we saw the word above a door where the maid denied us, as usual, but had hardly the forbidding on her breath when the mistress came rushing out of the gate after us to say, Yes, there were rooms at No. 8, and we could have our meals at her own table. All New England, though she was really so Old English, looked from her friendly eyes and hospitable face, and in five minutes we were comfortably domiciled. We

got a capital table d'hôte dinner, such as you get almost anywhere in English inns, at the hotel which had just refused us with thanks as lodgers, and next morning we breakfasted at our kind hostess's in the company of other South-Africans and North-Americans; with Australians, we seem the same thing to the English. There was a delicious Spanish melon to make us as much at home as if it were a Rocky Ford cantaloupe; one cut and came again as often as one liked. Life is not always disappointing, but sometimes behaves very handsomely.

After breakfast a day of perfect joy began; and though we grieved for a moment to learn that the morris dances, and the jigs and reels which used to be danced when England was merrier, if nakeder and hungrier, than now, were not to be danced on the green outside the Bacon theater, we learned from every moment's experience to be glad that they took place within on the stage. It was such a time as Bacon himself—or from this out, shall we indulge him in the travesty which he preferred and say Shakespeare?—would have delighted to share with us, and we easily figured him in the audience which crowded the place, where not the least pleasure, but one of the greatest pleasures, of the day was finding ourselves in a group of people such as next to Shakespeare (I will no longer say Bacon) I could most have wished to meet in that place.

A distinguished English actor who, in his undistinguished youth, had dramatized a story of the undistinguished youth of an American author, was brought face to face there by antic chance with the novelist who emerged from his confirmed obscurity to ask the actor's acquaintance; and the actor added over and above his own acquaintance that of all the friends about him: friends who could help the author's ignorance of the things going forward on the stage, and make his joy in them intelligent, though it would have been hard for the most wayfaring of men wholly to err therein. One could not well be mistaken in the pretty little girls and the pretty young girls, and the boys and youths who had come from the farms and shops (and notably from a great blueing factory near by) to take their parts in the competitions of song and dance.

All the figures were more or less dramatic, and not pantomimic only, but sung as well as stepped to the mellow music of small sleigh-bells strapped at knee and ankle, and to the

color of flirited handkerchiefs and of ribbons flashing from wrist and elbow. Perhaps the unlearned reader does not know (we did not know till we saw it there) that it is the genius of the morris dance for the dancers to come elastically on for the figure and to drop exhaustedly off at the end in languid procession. Morris On and Morris Off may have been English tradition added to the Moorish dance which some immemorial traveler brought home from Spain; but whatever the origin of the several dramas or of their rendering, their charm was in the bloom and bounding vigor and glad heart of the Merry England which they revived for us. Out of all the sung and acted incidents, I think I should have given the prizes to that one called "Blow away the Morning Dew," and that other one called, "No John, no John." In the one the dancers swayed and swept the shining drops from imaginary meadows; and in the other a Spanish lady denied an English sailor till her denying No unawares turned entreaty against his threat to leave her. I suppose the things were both of the nature of such things as are still played at children's parties, but in the elder youthful rendering they had the poetry which keeps the world young. There was another of these plays prettily called "Blue-eyed Stranger," which, together with "Bunches of Laudanum" (probably not originally laudanum) and "Cottage Gardens," pleased the fancy almost as much as those supreme two; and there was yet a very English other, "How do you do, Zir," which mixed defiance with welcome in the hands shaken across the circle, and was acceptably done by half-grown boys in smock frocks and slouching farm-work hats.

Everything went on under the severe criticism of a committee appointed to see that the dances were danced in the letter as well as the spirit. It seemed very English, or at least not American, to have the young gentleman who spoke for the committee call his censures across the whole depth of the theaters and tell the boys and girls, great and small, that they had not kept their legs stiff enough in a certain figure where they faced and crossed ankles. "You must keep your legs stiffer," he said, and the dancers took his rebuke with silent submission; but he found it harder to exact obedience from an enthusiastic fiddler who had entered so deeply into the affair that he could not get himself unaided out of it. He was always leading the dancers on to

pretty much the same tune, till at last the chairman publicly proclaimed, "Now, Ilmington, you have been on half a dozen times" (it might have been a dozen), "and we can't have you any more," and with this at last Ilmington acquiesced and evanesced, not apparently very willingly or promptly, but effectively.

I am aware of giving, barely enough, the brief outline of a pleasure which richly clothed itself in music, color, and motion for a whole summer's day, and still left us hungering for more of it. Most interesting it was, and the more delightful because it reproduced the gaiety of the past without its sad conditions; we saw the bloom and inhaled the perfume without feeling the thorns of the bramble which bore the pretty flowers. What made it the more acceptable was the reflection that the England making merry on the stage was glad at the cost of less suffering to the poor than ever before. Thanks to that greatest living Englishman, who is Welsh, there are now pensions for the old and sick and those without work, keeping them above want without putting them to shame. Lloyd-George has taken the sting from charity by making it justice, and forcing the rich to pay something more of their due portion of the common cost, as perhaps we Americans shall some day do when we sink our fear of Socialism in our realization of Christianity; so that now an Englishman and his American visitor may hereafter look on the joys of the poor without too sharp a pity. Even that day we could blamelessly feel the appealing quaintness of an old woman from some charitable refuge who had come out of it in her pathetic best bonnet and shawl and gown of the fashions of seventy years ago, and now sang a faded song, cheap in material and uncouth in make as her dress, but touching because it was so sincerely meant. I am glad to say that no event of the day seemed to please the audience half as much; so near to tears her doleful ditty left us, we could go back to our players and dancers with a good conscience.

I do not know how long it all lasted, but say from eleven to four, with an hour out for lunch; at the end, as I have said, it left us loath to go. We had been in Stratford before, and we had not the task of seeing the Bacon house and keeping the Shakespeare family out of it; we had even seen the Ann Hathaway cottage, where the young Francis Bacon came wooing her and making her believe by the new inductive

method of reasoning that her two years more than his did not count in love. So now we could give our leisure to wandering about the streets, curiously modern for the most part, but with here and there an effect of age in quaint keeping with such a name as Sheep Street, where we bought a sixteenth-century table and were later subjected to duty on it by our customs as if it had been just made in some English Grand Rapids factory. A noted English novelist lives in Stratford, and her house front, garlanded with flowering plants, was the just pride of the driver of our fly. He seemed to care more for it than for the Shakespeare house; and, in fact, there has never been any dispute as to the Baconian authorship of her novels. We visited the so-called Shakespeare house only so far as to pace its garden walk and gather from the brown sand under the parent tree a mulberry perfect yet from the ants, which know a ripe mulberry as soon as they see it on the ground. The taste of it enchanted me three thousand miles and sixty-five years away to a little Ohio town with the murmur of the Miami soft in my ear; and I could be well content to leave the house, with its chimney-corners and kitchens and gardens and birth-chambers and every manner of typical rather than actual relics, to the crowd avid of documents and evidences, or, failing these, of mere wonders and associations.

The truth, which I reluctantly confide to the reader, is that to the faith of even the firmest, the most violent Baconian there is something very staggering in that wavering and sagging Shakespeare house; and it is much better to keep to the garden walk under the mulberry-tree, which is at least neutral. We of the true faith ought really to build a Bacon house and a Bacon theater, with a Bacon picture-gallery, in Stratford, if we expect to establish our doctrine in universal acceptance. As for that divinely dear and lovely church where the poet's body lies, it would of course be difficult to rear such another fane of the fit antiquity; but something might have been done in 1800, when the slab over the bones was renewed, if only anybody had then had the Baconian truth which was not revealed to the luminous madness of Miss Bacon till fifty years later. As it is, the place is full of Shakespeare to the exclusion of the many other interesting monuments and effigies. The famous epitaph still curses or blesses you according to your will, and the face of the bust, scraped clean of the white paint which once

coated it to an effect of eighteenth-century good taste, smiles down upon you in the Elizabethan sincerity of red cheeks, hazel eyes, and reddish hair and beard.

How still and fine the cool English morning was under the "long-drawn aisle and fretted vault" of the trees through which we went and came in revering this hallowed temple! But we had once for all revered it on our first visit to Stratford, and now, on our second, we left it to the devoirs of others. Rather we kept our last afternoon for a row on the Avon, and hired a boatman to do the rowing for us. The Avon, as we knew it that day, was a leaf-fringed, silent slack-water (very unlike the joyous torrent we had known it at Bath), inviting us first down to the dam, which, with the mill beside it, holds the waters in check. I cannot say just why it should have so invited us except to show us on our return a shirt-sleeved, bareheaded youth in a canoe which suddenly and most unexpectedly (to us if not to him) turned turtle and flung him into the stream. It then flew inverted away, and as he struck out after it, blowing the water from him as he swam, he called out to our boatman in gay, transatlantic accents, "Is bathing in this river prohibited?" The boatman took him literally and reassured him, while we offered to "cumber him with help." "No, thank you," he said, "unless you can tell me where my coat and cap are." "Probably under the canoe," we suggested, and, "Probably they are," he assented, and he swam to the canoe and righted it and found them. It is not often that one can make a useful suggestion to a countryman in a strange water, and we rowed away with the satisfaction of a public benefactor, leaving the youth joking and wringing the Avon from his coat on the shore.

I suppose there are lovelier rivers in the world than the Avon at Stratford; the Babylonians used to brag of their Abana and Pharpar; and we have our Hudson and Mississippi, which are certainly larger. But the Avon not only has Stratford on it, with its immortal memories; it wanders through levels of wood and meadow which almost meet over it, or come to drink of it with their grasses; and from time to time it has a dwelling on its shores which tempts you to the nearest "estate agent" with the design of instant purchase, whether the house is for sale or not. The notion of hiring is too pale and poor; what you want is to own the place and live beside those storied waters a whole lifetime

of sunny hours such as the English summer knows how to spare the deserving wayfarer amid its more serious business of raining. I suppose it must have rained the next day, or that evening, for I have no recollection of the contrary; but we had our afternoon as perfect and sweet and mellow as that mulberry on the walk in Shakespeare's garden.

Other delights there had been through hospitalities which I must summon what little good taste I have to keep from betraying. But I will not try to ignore, even in the high interest of refined travel (travel striving to be everything that the English passion for privacy could ask of it), the signal pleasure of seeing somewhat afar the mansion of that historian of the American Revolution whose generous sense of our great struggle should make us, if possible, prouder of it than ever. There is no Englishman worthier than Sir George Trevelyan to dwell in that Shakespearian air among those Shakespearian fields and woods which were once Shakespeare's very own.

More days than we had might well have been given to the Shakespeare library and gallery (with whatever grief for its mistakenness), more nights than we had to the Shakespeare theater. We had come to Stratford partly to see that dramatization by an American woman of the *Pied Piper of Hamelin* legend, which had such fine moments of gentle poetic beauty and pathos; and the night after, we saw in the same place that most ungrateful and reluctant of the Shakespearian—or Baconian—tragedies, "*Richard II.*" It is idle for us to pretend that the American stage is equal to the English in realizing to the eye the historic circumstance of such a play; we might as well pretend we equal their acting. There was something richly absolute in the presentation of the figures in that scene; nothing was wanting to the splendor of the haughty Bolingbroke and the proud Norfolk making their brags and exchanging their challenges before that sad, silly despot whom their quarrel begins bringing to his prison and murder. I thought Mr. Benson did his *Richard* wonderfully well, while he let all the others play as ably up to him. I could have fancied that night in Stratford that it would have been a high pleasure to both Bacon and Shakespeare if they could have once sunk the question of its authorship and come to see it together.

W. D. HOWELLS,